

**MINUTES OF THE 37<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION ENGLAND  
STAFF COUNCIL HELD ON 23 SEPTEMBER 2004 AT NATIONAL OFFICE,  
CAMBRIDGE**

**Present: Official Side**

Paul Hill-Tout, Chairman  
John Scotney  
Ian Lamb  
Pauline Marchington, Secretary

**Trade Union side:**

Mick Hoban, Vice Chairman  
Stuart Grainger, PCS  
Crispin Thorn, Prospect  
Maria Henderson, PCS  
Josie Wragg, PCS  
Dick Gossling, PCS

**1. INTRODUCTION AND APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Ron Melville and John Winterbourne. Paul Hill-Tout welcomed Ian Lamb to the meeting.

**2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

Agreed as a true record.

**3. MATTERS ARISING**

Paul Hill-Tout took the opportunity to refer to the Modernising Rural Delivery (Haskins) Review saying that, in July, all staff had received a note from the Chairman, together with a Q&A. He asked the TUS if they had any feedback from staff on the Q&A, adding that he had only received one email himself. Mick Hoban said he was unaware of any further comments from staff and continued by advising that the TUS were engaging and representing FC England Staff interests at meetings with other Departments TUS. Paul Hill-Tout said that he was attending selected Departmental meetings which were relevant to the FC and that no communication from him to TUS meant that he had nothing to advise. Crispin Thorn said that lack of feedback from staff on the Q&A was likely to be due to the fact that staff have no real issue with the guiding principles outlined in the rural strategy, they were however concerned with issues which will impact directly on them.

Mick Hoban referred to the final paragraph under 'Matters Arising', relating to Partnership posts. The posts put forward with the Woodland Trust and the RSPB, had been welcomed, but, on reflection, the trawls for these posts should have gone

to FC staff first. Commission staff should be deemed eligible for these type of posts and this principle ought to be in place from now on as it will encourage staff development. John Scotney agreed, in principle, to this proposal, which would be applied, where possible, but there were sometimes difficulties in persuading other partners, particularly if the FC's contribution was at a low-level ratio.

Referring to paragraph 3, EWGS & GLADE, Mick Hoban advised that there was concern amongst staff regarding the slippage of the commencement dates for these. There was a significant workload and morale issue regarding the mis-match of dates, especially if EWGS was launched before the electronic system came into play and a lot of manual processing was required. In reply, Paul Hill-Tout said it was imperative to have the time scale for these synchronised in order to minimise the creation of any manual systems. There was a 3 month delay, at present, but he was confident that the two elements would stay together. Mick Hoban said he was concerned that staff in the Conservancies should have sufficiently detailed information well before the launch of EWGS & GLADE to enable them to give accurate advice in response to enquiries from the public and asked if a support package will be available. Paul Hill-Tout replied that, because of the Grant Management problem EWGS & GLADE had been sidelined but was now back in focus and revised transitional arrangements are expected in the autumn. John Scotney confirmed that Paul Johnston was back working on the new system now and would be drafting instructions for staff. Paul Hill-Tout said he would be making outline FC plans on EWGS & GLADE to the FTA conference in October.

Stuart Grainger asked, in light of the difficulties with the Grant Management budgets, if the Functional Specification for the new system would require to be adjusted to take account of the lessons learnt; in particular, would any elements be removed and, if so, which. Paul Hill-Tout stated that Internal Audit were preparing a report on Grant Management which would advise on lessons to be learnt. He was committed to these lessons being put into GLADE and the Functional Specification and would make enquiries of the Development Team in relation to the TUS' enquiry in order that they could clarify the situation for all. Additionally, further to their report, Internal Audit would need to validate that the new Functional Specification was workable.

Dick Gossling enquired whether there was an updated, final version of the EWGS consultation document available and Crispin Thorn also asked whether EWGS grants were likely to be affected – perhaps reduced – by possible financial constraints. In confirming that there was no updated consultation document Paul Hill-Tout sounded a note of caution saying that a lot depended on the outcome of the bids made to Defra, results of which will not be known until the Autumn and this may have an effect on the new system, i.e. no finance means no EWGS. He added that everything still had to be worked through and that the FC should only move forward when it has financial stability.

Dick Gossling requested that an interim statement of the present position be issued. Paul Hill-Tout accepted that this was necessary and confirmed that this would be done.

Action: David Bole

TRA, EAST MIDLANDS – John Scotney confirmed that this post had been trawled and filled substantively, as had the typing 6b post at NO and Tim Yarnell had joined National Office team on 1 July. Mick Hoban said he was pleased these matters had been resolved.

#### **4. RESTRUCTURING THE FC ENGLAND NATIONAL OFFICE IMPLEMENTATION TEAM & REGIONS POST.**

Paul Hill-Tout introduced the paper on this subject and said that it reflects an effective response to a real situation. Mick Hoban expressed concern for the staff reporting load of the Head of the restructured Grant & Regulations Services and for the Conservator London post being reported on by a “Senior Conservator”. He suggested that a senior member of NO staff could report on Conservator London. Paul Hill-Tout replied that the Head would not be reporting on any more staff than now and that all Conservator posts are at PB2 level with the exception of the Conservator London post, which is a PB3. He added that he was willing to take TUS views and ideas into account since he was still considering options and there was time to address matters carefully. He asked that TUS make their thoughts known, in writing, to John Scotney. In the spirit of the discussion he was also happy to alter the text of the paper to say “to move the line management of the Conservator London to another Senior Staff member”. Mick Hoban confirmed the TU Side’s agreement to the change and added that the title for Richard Britton’s new role was too ‘wordy’ and suggested ‘Head of Operations’. He also asked that the diagram for the post be extended to show the inter-relation of the role with other areas of the FC and FE. In reply, Paul Hill-Tout advised that the post had no direct links with FE but confirmed that the National Office staff chart would be re-adjusted and issued to TU Side.

Action: Ian Lamb

Mick Hoban referred to paragraph 10 of the paper and sought clarification with regard to Mr Hill-Tout’s statement therein that he was “not convinced that we need any more staff”, in relation to the take-on of FWPS functions in the next couple of years. At Conservancy level the assimilation was seen as a very significant factor and the subject was one which was worthy of a separate paper in itself, given the implications for staff. In response, Paul Hill-Tout agreed that FWPS should be the subject of a separate paper, to be worked through with the TUS, in the months ahead. He also said that FWPS needed to be recognised in the impending interim note to staff. He added that the Commission expected to come to a deal with Defra regarding the taking-on, at National Office level, of one of their staff members very knowledgeable in FWPS matters in order to cover the subject. This arrangement is being worked on and terms have yet to be agreed. Once the PB2 is in post the FC would need to reflect on its position, particularly with regard to Regional factors and web management.

Stuart Grainger asked for clarification on how the FC would be taking on FWPS from DEFRA, how it was going to be delivered e.g. GLADE (or GENESIS), and the resource implications. Paul Hill-Tout replied that agreement had yet to be reached in terms of what resources would come the Commission’s way; this was presently under negotiation. John Scotney accepted that all these points needed to be covered in the previously mentioned paper, which would be put the Staff Council

meeting in November. Paul Hill-Tout added that this was another item which was very closely tied to the Spending Round discussions and negotiations.

Action: Management Side

Crispin Thorn said the paper had a lot of three letter abbreviations in it and asked what PSG stood for? John Scotney said it was an error and should read PSB.

Paul Hill-Tout said Sandy Greig was running-down his duties prior to starting an extended period of leave in the latter part of November and Richard Britton was scheduled to be in his revised post by the end of that month. The trawl for the PB2 post will be put in train very quickly but Ian Lamb cautioned that the process could take around 10 weeks to deliver someone in place.

**At this point Paul Hill-Tout apologised and explained he had some important correspondence to finish before driving to Bristol and asked if any one had any issues to bring up before he left.**

Stuart Grainger asked if the proposals to move staff at National Office on to one floor were going ahead. Paul Hill-Tout confirmed this plan and said that the business case for it was strong and he had asked Barry Sidaway to facilitate the move. Stuart Grainger said that he understood the reasons for the proposals and that Barry had approached him to sit on the Working Group. However he decided to decline because of a possible conflict of interest with his Staff Council duties. He added that although, under the terms of the lease our occupancy of the building ran officially until 2010, it was unlikely given the proposed re-development of the Station Road area. He advised that a regular independent check should be made with the Planning Department on the progress of the development because, if money was spent refurbishing Great Eastern House and consent was given shortly thereafter earmarking the building for demolition, it might provoke some awkward questions. John Scotney welcomed this idea and added the consultation stage with staff is not an inflexible process.

Action: Barry Sidaway

Dick Gossling asked when the Citizen Charter target times, which were rescinded earlier in the year because of the Grant Management issues, would be brought back into play. Paul Hill-Tout said that, given the circumstances that had applied, it had been wholly appropriate to rescind the CC target times and that he would review the situation with Richard Britton and Sandy Greig and advise his decision accordingly.

Action: Richard Britton

**Paul Hill-Tout left the meeting and John Scotney took up the role of Chairman.**

## **5. PROPOSED CHANGES IN SOUTH WEST ENGLAND TEAM**

John Scotney introduced the subject and said that some of the changes in this useful paper were not essential to be put through the Staff Council. However, he thought it was useful for the Council to see the thought processes and he hoped other Conservancies would follow the same sort of line. Mick Hoban said it was a complex

paper that had done a good job to express something with so many strands. Dick Gossling said he had circulated it to colleagues in his Conservancy.

Mick Hoban said there was an issue, from the TU Side, regarding the proposal to simultaneously trawl the new, part-time EO post externally as well as internally. It was considered that the FC had a body of skills within the organisation to test first before going to an external trawl. Jo Wragg added that promotion prospects from AO to EO were poor and it was only fair to make the trawl an internal one, at the outset. John Scotney countered that this would cause a delay. Jo Wragg replied that the Conservancy had been without an EO for 11 months during Jo Scott's maternity leave, but that Jo was now back working part time, so there is at least some EO cover now. John Scotney commented that internal trawls often ended up with a very small field of applicants and suggested a compromise, that all FC applicants would be guaranteed an interview. Mick Hoban reiterated the TU's strong stance in the matter, in support of the national agreement and rejected the proposed compromise. After further discussion John Scotney accepted the TU case and confirmed that the trawl would be issued internally first. Mick Hoban thanked him for making the change and confirmed that the TU side had no objections to the WO and Partnership posts proposals. So far as the latter were concerned, John Scotney confirmed, in answer to a query from Jo Wragg, that the administrative post was graded at PB6b level, rather than PB6a.

## **6. NORTH EAST ENGLAND STAFFING**

John Scotney advised that this matter referred to a PB4 post, at North East England Conservancy, which was proposed to be blocked, for one year, by a PB3 grade. The situation would be reviewed at the end of that period, subject to assessment of the individual's health and work performance etc. Mick Hoban accepted the proposals and welcomed Management's flexibility of approach to a sensitive situation. He said that this line set a challenging benchmark for future Management strategy in such cases. John Scotney replied that the FC had gone the 'extra mile' in this case and that it was his intention to take this type of approach, wherever possible.

## **7. UPDATE ON TUS STRUCTURE IN ENGLAND**

Mick Hoban said the inaugural meeting of the joint FC/FE Organising Committee had been planned for mid September but, unfortunately, none of the FC England representatives had been able to attend due to prior commitments. Internal TUS constitutional changes had enforced the creation of the Committee and this was seen as a positive move, but the arrangements had not progressed as far as had been hoped. It is hoped and intended that more information will be able to be imparted to the Council at the next meeting.

## **8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Mick Hoban asked about the distribution of the Staff Council Minutes and suggested they be made available on the Intranet as they merited transfer to a wider readership. John Scotney said the Intranet was an issue but agreed the TU suggestion regarding the wider distribution of the minutes.

Action: Ian Lamb/Pauline Marchington

Stuart Grainger said there was also a need for GLADE to have a place on the web. John Scotney acknowledged that the web was not progressing too well; this area of work came within Mark Pritchard's remit and there was a possibility that money may be available, within GLADE funding, to create a new post, potentially at PB4 level, in order to address this outstanding matter.

## **9. DATES OF NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS**

Next Meeting: Wednesday, 24 November 2004

Dates for Meetings within 2005 were also provisionally agreed, as follows:

Thursday, 20 January

Thursday, 17 March

Thursday, 26 May

Thursday, 22 September

Wednesday, 23 November

A date for a meeting during July will be agreed in due course.